VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

OCTOBER 2004 TWO DOLLARS

Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr

On September 30, 2004, on the steps of Monticello, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries dedicated the Piedmont phase of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. In the tradition of Lewis and Clark, who were dispatched by Thomas Jefferson to blaze new territory, we proudly offer the first statewide wildlife viewing trail in the country.

The Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail offers 65 driving loops totaling 5,750 miles that lead to 665 sites where visitors can hike, bike, or paddle to experience the state's diverse natural habitat and wildlife. From the Atlantic Ocean on Virginia's eastern border, to the towering Mt. Rogers at its southwest corner, the Commonwealth includes every wildlife habitat that occurs naturally between Maine and Florida. Virginia has long been known as a travel destination for people seeking to enjoy the state's long history and rich culture. Now with the completion of the statewide Trail, visitors can enjoy Virginia's beautiful natural resources along with its heritage.

Within Virginia's 43,000 square miles of diverse natural habitat, you can find some 400 species of birds, 250 species of fish, 150 species of terrestrial and marine animals, 150 species of amphibians and reptiles, and a wide variety of aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates.

This places Virginia in the forefront of a national trend. Nature tourism has grown tremendously over the last 20 years. Participation in birding and wildlife watching alone has increased nationally by 266 percent (388 percent in the South) since 1982, with one in every three Americans enjoying this recreational pastime. Equally impressive are the economics of wildlife viewing. During the past 10 years, total spending on wildlife watching has increased by more than 120 percent. Over $788 million was spent for wildlife watching activities in Virginia in 2001. This trend underscores what sportsmen and women have known for years—that the best place to be is outdoors and this new Trail system will get you there.

The five-year process has involved more than 500 partners—state and local government, conservation groups, tourism organizations, and private individuals—who came together with the goal of bringing the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail to the public. Key cooperators in this effort have included the Virginia Department of Transportation (funding much of the Trail development); Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (funding printing of the Coastal guide); and the Virginia Tourism Corporation (handling requests for guides). People who want to tour the Trail can get a free copy of the Coastal, Mountain, and Piedmont guides by calling toll-free 1-866-VA-BIRDS (822-4737).

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.

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About the cover: The American woodcock *(Scolopax minor)*, also known as the timberdoodle or wood snipe, is one of Virginia's most elusive game birds. Its average size is 11 inches. It has big dark eyes, and a long, narrow bill that is used to pluck earthworms from the ground. Feather patterns resemble leaves making them very difficult to spot while sitting on the ground. Their preferred habitat is damp thickets that surround forests, bottomlands, swampy areas and coastal meadows. Woodcock are found all along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, but as winter's grip takes hold, woodcock will begin to move south and migrate through Virginia. ©Maslowski Photo.

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Farmville's "Other" Lake

Hidden beneath the notoriety of Briery Creek Lake is Sandy River Reservoir, Farmville's "other" lake.

story and photos
by Marc N. McGlade

"Always a bridesmaid and never a bride" is the story of Sandy River Reservoir, located slightly southeast of Farmville. Sandy River constantly plays second fiddle to Farmville's well-known Briery Creek Lake. Whereas Briery Creek has national notoriety, folks outside Virginia haven't heard of 740-acre Sandy River Reservoir; in fact, even residents of the Commonwealth are unaware of this exceptional fishery.

I can vividly recall my freshman year at Longwood College back in August 1981. Tucked away in the beautiful rolling hills of Southside, this quaint little town of Farmville was reminiscent of Mayberry—sans Andy and Barney. Back then, Farmville's main angling opportunities were private farm ponds or the Appomattox River, which of course, I fished as often as possible.

Great day how things have changed some 23 years later! Farmville, approximately 60 miles southwest of downtown Richmond, has expanded. Longwood now has university status, and even though Sandy River wasn't even a gleam in anyone's eye when I lived in Farmville, today it's an excellent fishery deserving of the accolades it's starting to receive.

Sandy River opened to the public in 1996. Small creeks and rivers of the southern Piedmont, including Sandy River, Little Sandy Creek and Marrowbone Creek feed Sandy River Reservoir.

Dan Michaelson is a fisheries biologist with Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries in the Farmville field office, and he has exceptional things to say about this underrated fishery.

"Sandy is under my care and has become one of our favorites (lakes)," he says. "The reservoir belongs to Prince Edward County and we manage the fishery and enforcement through a cooperative agreement with the county."

After you read the lowdown on Sandy, you'll wonder how could it be possible that this jewel of a reservoir sneaks underneath the radar screen of freshwater anglers. It's strange, but true. Nestled in a tranquil setting, Sandy River beckons anglers to come cast their lines in its clean, fertile waters.

Sandy River Reservoir has an assortment of shoreline cover and an excellent fishing pier.

"We've spent a lot of time at Sandy River Reservoir the last two years, and it's becoming one of the best bass lakes in Southside for numbers and size of fish," Michaelson says. "The bass and channel catfish fisheries are excellent with other fisheries being average for this part of the state."

Like many of Virginia's lakes, rivers and reservoirs, Sandy River has multiple species from which to choose, so if you don't know largemouth bass from butter beans, that's no problem. There are plenty of other fish species anglers can target.

Sandy's Census

"Largemouth bass, channel catfish, bluegill, redear, black crappie, chain pickerel and a few walleye make up the assortment," he says.

These species are among Vir-

ginia's most popular and sought-after freshwater fish. At Sandy River, the fish grace its visitors with Southern hospitality and are willing and eager to bite.

Like a pit bull latched onto a Chihuahua, chain pickerel—or jackfish—are prone to pounce on most largemouth bass lures or live baits, especially minnows. They add excitement to any outing.

The Department is stocking walleye, but they are having limited success getting this fishery off the ground. After the stocking effort in 2004 and fall monitoring, the Department will reevaluate the fisheries' success and determine if they will continue stocking marble eyes, he explains.

The Department stocks 8-inch channel catfish every other year at a rate of 10 per acre, or 7,400 total. They also stock 50 fingerling walleyes per acre annually, or 37,000 total.

Michaelson says growth of largemouth bass is good with bass reaching 12 inches by age 3, and 15 inches by age 5. He adds that bass have been topping out at about 22 inches, or 7 to 8 pounds. Black crappies are a slower-growing species here, and quality fish in the population were dominated by the original year-class (1994) that is now exiting the fishery through mortality. The biologist says crappies reach 9 inches by age 3, but then growth slows and the maximum size reached is 10 to 11 inches, weighing three-fourths of a pound. A lack of appropriate quantity and size prey for the larger fish is suspected to drive the slower growth rates for older fish, he says.

"Bluegill grow well up to 8 inches then growth slows significantly as with crappie," Michaelson says. "Bluegills can grow as long as 10 inches, and redears (shellcrackers) can measure between 11 and 12 inches.

"We're in the process of getting channel catfish aged with otoliths (ear bones). We're reasonably confident that catfish are reaching 19 inches by age 4. Channel catfish measuring 30 inches in length and weighing 9 to 10 pounds have shown up in our net surveys. Chain pickerel grow to roughly 20 inches, or 2 pounds."

Larger individuals, of course, can be caught from time to time of all species, but these are the normal upper limits found by biologists during sampling. To aid biologists with statistical data, it's common for lakes and rivers to undergo creel surveys. A survey-taker will ask anglers a series of questions as anglers conclude their day of fishing. These data are then compiled and help represent the fishery.

"We're currently in the process of running our first creel survey at Sandy and it won't be completed until November," he says. "Anecdotally, fishermen report catching 30 to 40 bass on many days and can catch all the 8-inch crappie they can stand in the early spring. Chain pickerel are also a hot catch and channel catfishing in the summer is excellent."

Michaelson says the largemouth bass abundance is incredible. During 2003, the Department sampled intensively and catch rates were 180.7 fish per hour of electrofishing.

"About 100 fish per hour is average across the state," he says. "Bluegills average 200 to 250 fish per hour at Sandy."

Interestingly, Michaelson and his colleagues didn't find an unproductive area when they sampled Sandy. The keen eye of an astute angler can aid in eliminating unproductive

Above: Steve Morris of Haymarket caught this nice Sandy River Reservoir largemouth bass in early spring, but anglers can enjoy success year-round. Right: An assortment of artificial lures that will catch their share of largemouth bass.

A jig-and-pig combination fished along some of the riprap that is found around the shoreline of Sandy River Reservoir can be very productive.

Sandy Specifics

- To reach Sandy River Reservoir from Route 460, take SR 640 South and turn left onto the reservoir access road.
- Sandy River Reservoir has a two-lane concrete ramp available for boaters, with plenty of parking.
- For specific questions regarding the Sandy River fishery, call the VDGIF Farmville district office at (434) 392-9645 or visit online at www.dgif.virginia.gov.
- A lake brochure and contour map are available from the VDGIF Farmville district office.
- Contact the Farmville Area Chamber of Commerce at (434) 392-3939, or visit them on the Web at www.chamber.farmville.net.
- Open 24 hours per day, year-round.
- Sandy River has a 10-horsepower maximum limitation for outboard engines. If you don't have an outboard, it can drain a trolling-motor battery in a day's outing, so it's best to bring a spare.
- VDGIF, Prince Edward County, Dominion Virginia Power and the Virginia National Guard collaborated to construct a courtesy pier and a 150-foot fishing pier (which are handicapped-accessible) for visitors—VDGIF placed fish attractors alongside the pier to enhance the fisheries habitat.
- Handicap-accessible restrooms are on site.

water simply by understanding fish habitat and environment. A lack of cover, structure or contour doesn't always mean fishless areas, but spots that harbor structure are usually more productive.

"All areas of this lake are good for bass fishing," Michaelson says. "Standing timber in the upper Marrowbone Creek arm and the upper Sandy River arm hold big fish. Quantity can be found on any structure in the lake. Beaver huts are excellent places for panfish and channel catfish seem to be best in the upper one-third of the lake."

What's for Supper?

There are plenty of snacks for Sandy's predator fish to consume. Gizzard shad are widely available, ranging in size from 8 to 11 inches, although many 3- to 5-inch shad were schooled up this past fall in the upper lake, according to Michaelson. He indicates 2003 was an excellent year for shad. Predators also have the dining options of sunfish and small crappie. Michaelson says golden shiners are common as well.

"Predators rely heavily on sunfish since gizzard shad grow so fast and the bigger shad can't be used by any predator, except for large bass (because of the enormous size of the gape of a big bass's mouth)," he says. "Gizzard shad are abundant for the size of this reservoir."

He says largemouth recruitment in this lake is tremendous. Fall samples and age and growth surveys indicate one strong year-class after another entering the Sandy fishery. The outlook for this reservoir is excellent.

"The Department just changed the size limit for largemouth bass from a 14-inch minimum to a 14- to 20- inch slot limit (the creel limit for bass is five fish with only two of the five over 20 inches) to let more 'trophy' bass grow and survive to reach the citation size range," Michaelson says. "The bass population is very dense and thus we allow harvesting of smaller fish. The channel catfish fishery is one of the best in Southside and continues to impress us with size and abundance of fish available. Panfish groups will remain average and we hope that another strong year-class of crappie will enter the fishery soon to fill the void left by the departure of the 1994 year-class. Crappie will probably never be exceptional, but will provide entertainment and an active harvest fishery. Walleye seem to lack suitable summer habitat (cool, oxygenated water) to thrive, but we will reevaluate this fall to determine if the stocking program will continue."

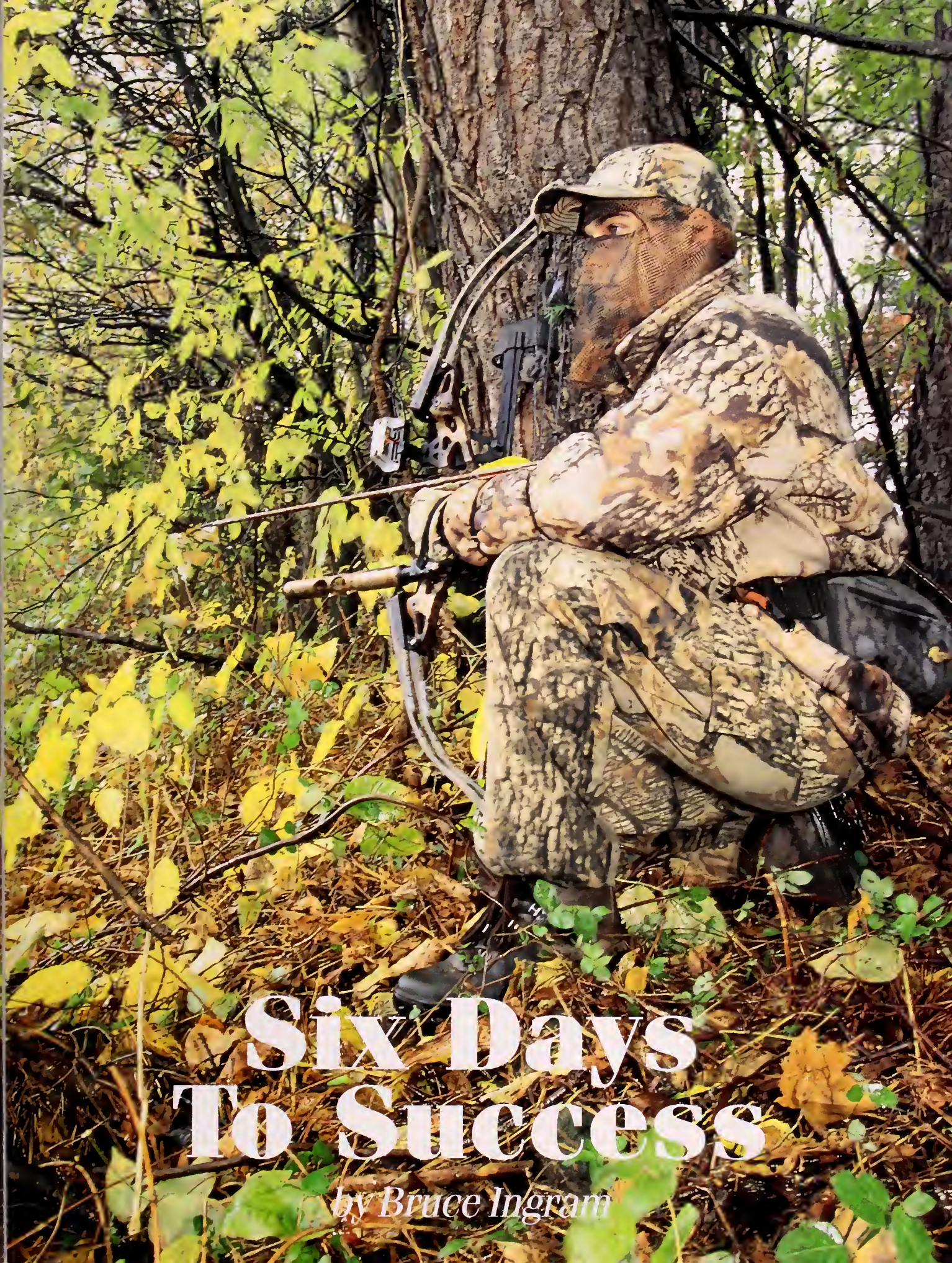
Southside's Unheralded Jewel

Nope, no more bridesmaid for Sandy River. Now it's show time. Come check out what the charming Farmville area has to offer in its varied angling opportunities, and its "other" lake. Bring a basic assortment of traditional lures or live baits to catch Sandy's residents and you'll be glad you visited.

"This reservoir is just reaching its full potential now," Michaelson says.

I wonder what the Longwood University freshmen are doing this year? Hopefully studying, and not spending too much time casting their lines in Sandy River Reservoir, as I would have done! □

Marc McGlade is a writer and photographer from Midlothian. Marc is a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife, Game & Fish, FLW Outdoors, North Carolina Sportsman, The Sportsman's Magazine *and other national and regional publications.*



Six Days To Success

by Bruce Ingram

©Dwight Dyke

Serious bowhunters know the opening week of Virginia's early archery deer season offers prime hunting conditions.

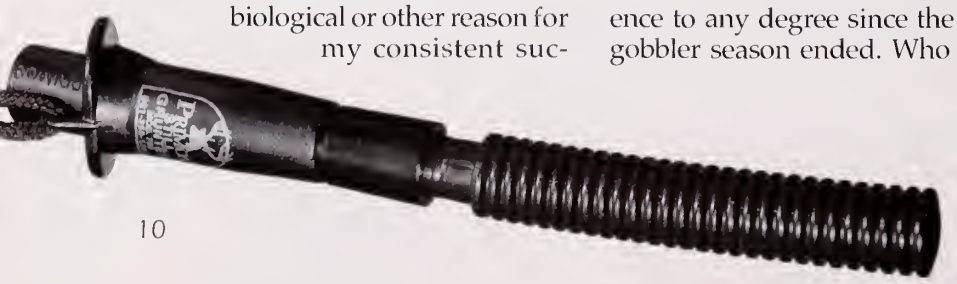
To me, the first six days of Virginia's bow season has an almost mystical aura to it. The last eight years, I have either killed a deer on opening day or within the first six days of the season. Typically during those early outings, I average seeing three or four per sitting, and eventually one of them comes within the 20-yard shooting range I have established for myself.

That said, in spite of my opening week success, I have never arrowed a whitetail during the second week of the season and generally find them more difficult to pattern; I also glimpse fewer of them. And the ones I do see are often more skittish and on the lookout for danger. I asked Dave Steffen, the forest wildlife program manager for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and an avid bowhunter himself, if there were a biological or other reason for my consistent success the first week —and consistent failure the second one.

"It's an interesting concept that the deer might be easier to hunt during the opening week," he says. "To you and me, the opening week of archery would seem to be a time when the woods are virtually empty of folks, and the surroundings are very peaceful. But deer are very attuned to their environment, and they may perceive the hunter presence as being very unsettling."

"When we bowhunters show up in the woods the first week of October, the deer have really by and large not had to deal with human presence to any degree since the spring gobbler season ended. Who knows what the effect is on deer when they cut a bowhunter's track and pick up human scent when they haven't done so in months. Certainly, the increased hunter presence in early October can not compare to the increased number of people in the woods from, say, the bow season to the beginning of the early muzzleloader one."

The Department annually conducts a bowhunter survey to learn more about the Commonwealth's deer herd. At this writing, the last year for which figures are available is the 2002 season. Over the course of the six weeks of the early bow season, Steffen says that very little variation exists concerning the number



of does archers see per 100 hours in the woods. The statistics are as follows:

Week 1	33.3
Week 2	34.9
Week 3	32.5
Week 4	32.8
Week 5	28.9
Week 6	33.0

Those figures tell me that while I generally see fewer deer the second week of the season, other archers—on average—around the state do not. And the conclusion drawn from that is that I should hunt different areas the second week of the season from the ones I do the first, in order to take some for the pressure off my local deer herd. Other Old Dominion bowhunters who typically see fewer deer after opening week might want to consider changing their stand sites and/or hunting grounds as well.

Buck sightings per 100 hours of bowhunting, however, generally trend upward. Steffen speculates that this increase may have a biological reason—the ever-increasing approach of the rut. The buck sighting figures are as follows:

Week 1	11.2
Week 2	12.3
Week 3	13.2
Week 4	16.1
Week 5	15.0
Week 6	12.9

©Bruce Ingram

A good sharp skinning knife, compass, flashlight and scented deer lure are important items to carry with you when hunting deer.

©Bill Lea

One of the biggest advantages of hunting deer during the first week of Virginia's archery season is there are fewer people in the woods and deer tend to be less skittish.

Over the course of those eight bow seasons, I have only killed two bucks—an eight and a seven-pointer—during opening week. And I very rarely espy any antlered whitetails during those six days, so my experiences in this case dovetail well with the Department's survey results. I also tend to see more bucks as the archery season progresses and have arrowed two bucks during the third week. But the nicest bucks I have seen and the ones I have called in by using grunt tubes or bleat calls have been during the fourth week. This week is also when I have espied the most bucks, observations that nicely match the Department's figures. Dave Steffen offers some analysis concerning the buck figures.

"It might also be worth noting the declining observation rate of bucks in week 5 (the second week in November) and especially in week 6 (the third week in November)," he says. "While the rut is really in full swing during this period, these weeks also coincide with the early muzzleloading season. Week 5 is the first week of muzzleloader season east of the Blue Ridge, and week 6 is the statewide muzzleloader season, which is our first week in the west.

"The decline in observations is exactly what you would expect with the onset of muzzleloading season and its concurrent increased hunting pressure. It is probably a good example of the effect of hunting pressure on deer vulnerability. The decrease in week 5 is probably less evident because only half the state has a muzzleloading season in this week. It is interesting that the does do not show this same decline in weeks 5 and 6. Hunters know that these weeks are prime time for buck hunting. Looks like the does also know the same thing."

Here is one other tidbit of information from Steffen to ponder. Statistically, progressively fewer Virginia bowhunters go afield every week of the six weeks that the survey covers. Steffen wonders if, given the

difficulty of killing a deer with a bow, people become more and more discouraged as each week progresses. The decreased participation is so pronounced, says the biologist, that only half as many archers are afield in week 6 as there are in week 1.

Preparing for Opening Week

Just after the Fourth of July, I visit an archery shop and ask a professional there to fully inspect my compound and determine if any parts need to be replaced, repaired, or tightened. Of course, I could learn to do this type of thing myself, but trained personnel are much more likely to find a potential problem than I ever would.

Another reason I rely on the expertise available at an archery shop is to begin developing total confidence in my equipment for the upcoming season. I simply don't want to have to worry about something going wrong with the bow. Next, I begin a pre-season shooting regiment that continues until the opener. Every other day while standing on a chair on my sundeck, I shoot nine arrows at a target. Standing on a chair and shooting at a target simulates how I later will be aloft in a tree stand and shooting downward at a whitetail.

Also, at this time, I inspect each of my four tree stands, tighten any loose nuts and bolts, lubricate with vegetable oil any squeaky areas, and test the stands out by standing in them while they are only a foot off the ground. Statistically, climbing in and out of a tree stand is the most dangerous aspect of hunting, and the summer is the time to make sure a stand is in perfect working order. I have tried a variety of safety harnesses over the years, and they too are a must for bowhunters. Last year for about $100, I purchased a Hunter Safety System harness that incorporates much of the harness apparatus inside a vest. Regardless of which brand of safety harness you purchase, be aware that this device can save a life.

In August, I contact the landowners where I had permission to hunt the previous year to renew my permission for the coming season; I want to be among the first individuals to contact them, instead of among the last. Every weekend in September, I scout those properties. While scouting in early and mid September, I primarily look for habitat changes. For example, has a timber cutting taken place, have trees fallen across favorite deer travel lanes, or has the landowner planted a new field or let an old one become fallow.

The last weekend of September is the crucial time for determining exactly where I will hunt opening day and week. During the middle of the day from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., I visit as many farms and woodlots as I can on Saturday and Sunday. I don't like to scout before and after that time range because deer are more active early and late, and I stand a greater chance of disturbing their routines—a real negative so close to the season.

The main thing I try to determine

©Bruce Ingram

Above: Developing a preseason shooting regiment is a good way to get in shape for the upcoming hunt. White oak (lower left) and black oak (lower right) acorns are favorite foods for Virginia's deer.

©Bruce Ingram

©Bruce Ingram

that weekend is what is the food situation. Ask just about any Virginia bowhunter around the state what the number one food source for whitetails is and chances are good that the answer will be a white oak acorn. The problem with the white oak *(Quercus alba)* is that it is a notoriously fickle producer of nuts. If I happen to locate a grove of white oaks that are shedding their acorns, then I will very likely position a portable there. An even better situation is for the white oak crop to have failed, except for a few isolated trees that are producing an abundance of acorns—and for the individual hunter to know the location of those trees.

A more likely scenario many years is for the white oak crop to be spotty, then hunters will have to depend on their knowledge of the red oak family. Across the Old Dominion, a number of red oak species thrive, such as the Northern red, scarlet, black, blackjack, and pin species. I own several tree field guides and use them extensively during my pre-season scouting. Identify which species of red oaks are dropping their bounty and then try to find those species on farms, the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest, or at any of the state's wildlife management areas.

Of course, some years the hard mast crop fails altogether. Then I will be forced to find what soft mast foods the deer may be foraging on such as apples or pawpaws or where they are entering fields to feed on various grains and grasses. The main point I want to emphasize here is that if I spend the time to locate deer menu items before the season begins, my chances to tag a whitetail during opening week will be extremely good—and the same likely holds true for you.

The last weekend of September is also when I wash all my hunting clothes with a scent-free detergent and baking soda and store the garb in either plastic bags or hard plastic containers. The deer may not have been hunted for a while, but they still are quite aware of the smell that a human emits. By washing and storing your clothes in the preceding manner—and employing various cover scents and donning any of the various camouflage suits that have scent control materials built in—we can go a long way toward masking our scent.

©Bruce Ingram

Here, two bowhunters take the time to examine acorns. Knowing which foods deer like to eat is especially important during the first week of Virginia's archery season.

I also assemble a day pouch that contains such essential items as a knife, compass, flashlight, drag rope, gutting gloves, cover scents, food (especially apples), water bottle and calls. The sound makers I rely on for opening week are the doe bleat and fawn ones. A fawn bleat call is excellent for luring in mature does, and a doe bleat is a sound that is very natural in the woods at this time.

Last, I strongly recommend staying on stand all day during the Saturday opener. One year I arrowed a deer at 12:09 on opening day, and on another opener, I was successful at 10:53. Many archers leave their stands shortly after 9:00 a.m. and don't return until late in the evening. But my experience has been that opening week Virginia whitetails move around a great deal during the middle of the day, and my chances for success are just as good midday as they are early and late.

The first six days of the Old Dominion's archery season is my favorite time of the deer season as a whole. Prepare yourself for this period, and it may just become your preferred time, too.

Bruce Ingram is a nationally renowned outdoor writer and photographer, and lifelong resident of Southwest Virginia. He is a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife.

©Maslowski Photo

Hunting Virginia's Neglected Game Bird

by Gerald Almy

For woodland bird hunters the woodcock offers a real hunting challenge.

There's something especially intriguing about hunting a game bird that many people don't even know exists. That's the way it is when you let slip that you're a woodcock hunter. Only about 10,000 sportsmen pursue this quarry in the state. But the fact is there's a great hunting opportunity for these delightful, seven-ounce tan and brown birds in the Old Dominion.

Flights come through from November through January, depending on what part of the state you're hunting. You'll find little competition for this reclusive quarry that offers great

©Gerald Almy

Finding the right kind of habitat and having a well-trained bird dog are two of the most productive ways for hunting woodcock.

sport for both the walk-up hunter and those who have bird dogs to help them. Here are some of the most important tips and tactics I've learned from 30 years of pursuing this neglected game bird throughout the Commonwealth.

Carry a light, quick-handling gun. In the dense cover where woodcock hang out, brief opportunities and snap shots are common. You don't want a heavy, long-barreled gun that's slow to come up. The shotgun should jump to your shoulder like a feather. For most of us, this will mean a light 12, 16 or 20-gauge, in any action you prefer. Go with a 28 or .410 only if you're an expert shot.

Use the right choke. For a late season hunt with skittish birds in somewhat open terrain, you may want an improved cylinder or modified barrel (or a double with one of each of those constrictions). For the vast majority of woodcock shooting, though, a skeet or open-bored gun is best.

For years my primary woodcock gun was a 16 gauge side-by-side that I had sawed three inches of barrel off to get a better pattern for the close-flushing woodcock I was encountering.

Pick the right shot size. The woodcock is easy to bring down and the dense pattern you get with small shot sizes is helpful in the thick cover. Go with No. 8 for most hunting, perhaps 7½ for late season or semi-open areas where long shots are possible.

Wear rubber-bottomed boots. You can hunt grouse, deer and turkey with leather boots, but timberdoodles are often found in damp areas near stream bottoms, bogs and spring seeps. Rubber bottoms or totally rubber boots will keep your feet dry in this habitat.

Walk through the cover slowly and thoroughly. This is especially important without a dog, but also if you have one. The woodcock blends in perfectly with its environment and will often hold tight and let dogs and humans walk past if it senses the intruders are moving quickly and it can escape by simply hunkering down. Without a dog, you might walk within 10 yards of a bird and not flush it if your pace is fast and steady. Even with a canine assistant, if you work too fast it might miss some birds.

Use the sudden pause to flush birds. For the jump shooter, this is the most important tactic you can learn about flushing more woodcock and also getting better shots at them. When you walk steadily, woodcock nearby know exactly where you are and feel they can sit tight and rely on their camouflage for protection. But when you stop suddenly, the quarry gets alarmed. It senses it has been spotted and must fly or be caught.

Plan where you stop. It requires a bit of finesse to use this technique properly. You don't want to stop too far from a likely piece of cover because if a bird flushes it may be out of range. You also don't want to stop when you're tangled in honeysuckle and sticker bushes and couldn't get a

©Gerald Almy

shot off if a bird did burst out. It's also a waste of time to stop in areas where the cover isn't particularly good. Eyeball the terrain and vegetation as you work through the cover and try to time the pause just as you get in good shooting range, where the ground is level and no honeysuckle or greenbriers are wrapped around you.

Try to predict where the birds might fly. Where is the most likely piece of prime habitat they are likely to fly towards? Are there tree limbs or bushes that will obstruct your shot if you pause in the wrong spot? When you find the best area to pause, simply stop and wait silently for 10–30 seconds. You'll have your feet firmly planted, the gun at port arms and be ready when a bird flushes with whistling wings.

Gauge how often you pause according to the cover. How often you stop to try to flush birds varies with how good the terrain and vegetation looks. Sometimes in prime cover I may pause every 50 feet. In other cases, with more open habitat, I may go 75 yards or more without stopping.

Learn to recognize prime cover. The inviting type of woodland where it looks like it would be a nice place to take a walk with mature trees and open views is not good woodcock habitat. Instead, focus on tangled-looking patches of cover and thickets with young tree growth. Concentrate on spots with lots of brush, briars and dense thickets. Plant species woodcock favor include dogwood, willow, birch, ash, sumac, crab apple, popple, hawthorn, holly, viburnum, plum, alder, blackberry, honeysuckle and grape.

Focus on stream bottoms for the best hunting. While woodcock can sometimes be found on hillsides in Virginia, over three decades of hunting these birds I've found the most productive spots are along damp stream bottoms. This is where the birds find a plentiful supply of earthworms, which make up 90 percent of their diet. Look for low brush and lots of cover. Trees in the 8 to 15 foot tall range are best, according to studies Virginia biologists have done.

Search for sign in woodcock coverts. While you hunt for woodcock be watching for the sign they leave. The primary type is the chalky white "splashings" they deposit. These are about the size of a 50-cent piece. If they're wet, a bird should be nearby. Also be alert for the pencil-sized holes the birds leave with their beaks as they probe for worms.

Leave broad-ranging, rambunctious bird dogs at home. A dog is an advantage for hunting woodcock only if it's a close-ranging one, very obedient or perhaps old and slow moving, rarely ranging out of sight. What you want is nose more than energy.

A topnotch woodcock dog should cautiously stalk through cover, investigating every nook and cranny that might hold a bird, staying within 50 to 75 yards of you. His value will be for finding birds that might have hunkered down and let you walk past them, and also for retrieving hit game. A broad ranging, energetic dog that wanders far will likely bust more birds than he points and be out of sight so often in thick cover that you'll spend more time looking for him than hunting.

Tune in the Weather Channel. Woodcock tend to make major travel movements when a north or northwest wind blows, using the air currents to help them along on their journey south. This can bring the first birds into northern Virginia coverts by late October, but the first

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When working heavy cover make sure you take time to look down. Right: Woodcock make distinctive splashings. If it looks fresh—get ready.

week of November is often the very best time of all for new flights to arrive.

When a north wind sweeps across the Mid-Atlantic, look for birds filtering into coverts the next day or two. One bird tagged in a Penn State study flew for three hours without stopping, covering 92 miles in one night before landing in a streamside thicket near Front Royal, Virginia. By mid and late November and early December birds are abundant in the middle and southern parts of the state, with good hunting lasting well into January if the winter is fairly mild. A few birds stay in the state year-round, but most woodcock that hunters encounter are migrants, visiting us for a few months each year on their journeys further south.

©Gerald Almy

Woodcock are masters of blending in with their natural surroundings so it's important that you stay alert, and are ready to shoulder your gun quickly and safely.

Watch for freezes to the north. Once the ground to the north freezes it prevents woodcock from probing for earthworms with their long, sensitive beaks. They have no choice but to fly south, and often that means to Virginia.

Amelia Lottery Hunt

If you're looking for an especially unique woodcock hunting opportunity in the state, consider applying for a hunting permit on the 2,217-acre Amelia Wildlife Management Area in the Piedmont region. That's right, a permit. "For the past six years we have conducted a lottery hunt at Amelia WMA that applies to hunters of quail, rabbits and woodcock," says Department wildlife biologist Jim Bowman. "We placed limits on the number of persons allowed to hunt quail, rabbits and woodcock in an effort to evaluate effects on the quail and rabbit populations, hunter success and hunter satisfaction. During the same period Amelia has been the focus of intensive habitat management efforts to promote quail, rabbits, woodcock and other early-successional species."

"In most years we have received about 180 applications for about 56 hunting slots. Each person with a permit is allowed to bring along two guests. The first five years showed some improvement for rabbits, and hunter satisfaction levels also improved."

Woodcock hunters were not surveyed separately, but doubtless their level of satisfaction also improved with the lower number of people on the area. "In order to effectively manage the hunting pressure on the habitats and hunting techniques associated with quail and rabbits, we believed it necessary to include woodcock in the lottery hunt program at Amelia," says Bowman. "The lottery hunt for woodcock is largely a by-product of the goal to restrict hunting pressure on quail. In other words, woodcock hunters look like quail hunters and sometimes hunt the same habitats."

Amelia sits at 200-300 feet elevation levels and consists of bottomland hardwoods and pine stands. The wildlife management area adjoins the Appomattox River on the north and east. Formerly farmland, much of the habitat is open. There are uplands with quail and rabbits but the damp river flood plain is the best location for finding the area's woodcock during migratory flights.

For more information on the Amelia WMA lottery hunt, contact the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries regional office in Forest at (434) 525-7522. □

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This year's woodcock hunting season runs from October 30 to November 13 and opens back up on December 18 and goes through January 1, 2005. Hunters can hunt one-half hour before sunrise until sunset and take 3 birds per day, 6 in possession.

Keep track of hot spots. When you flush several woodcock from a particular area, mark that spot and date in your memory, or better yet (if your memory is like mine) in a notebook. Unless the habitat changes, grows too old or is developed, you should be able to go back and enjoy good woodcock action there in other years around that same date.

Cover stream bottom habitat thoroughly. If the best cover along a creek extends only around 20 or 30 yards on each side of a stream, you can generally hunt it effectively by making just one pass down each side. For wider strips of habitat, double back on each side. Hunt along the edge of the creek first, then move out away from the water and hunt back down in a parallel route 30 to 40 yards away from the stream, probing territory you missed on the first swing.

Repeat this on the other side of the creek. If you flush a bird along the stream, chances are it will land further away from the water if you miss or don't get a shot. The second pass you make a ways out from the creek will likely allow you to flush that timberdoodle again.

Time your shot carefully. Often you'll flush woodcock at very close range, sometimes literally at your feet or a few yards away. This is too close to try a shot—the gun's pattern won't be wide enough and if you do connect the bird might be torn up. Let it fly out a ways before making the shot.

Another reason to pause is that sometimes woodcock will "helicopter" straight upwards on the flush, then almost pause momentarily before they take off flying away from you. Time the shot so that it corresponds to that pause when the bird starts to level off and fly away and it becomes a fairly easy target.

When you connect on a woodcock, mark the spot well by lining up your vision on some object near the fallen quarry's location. Don't worry about shooting a second or third bird that might erupt until you have carefully marked the spot where the first one went down. Head straight towards it and chances are it will be easy to find. Even if you have a good dog, it helps to pinpoint the area where you saw the bird fall for him to begin his retrieve.

Coats are all right for some types of hunting, but for woodcock a vest is preferable. It keeps you from sweating as much and allows free arm movement as you swing on game.

If a woodcock flushes and you're caught off-guard, don't waste a desperation shot. Instead, get your feet firmly planted, raise your gun and be ready. In many cases a second or even third bird will erupt from the cover and you'll be ready for them. If another bird doesn't flush, watch where the first one went. Often you can walk in that direction and reflush it.

Gerald Almy is a full-time outdoor writer and photographer and has been a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife *magazine for over 20 years.*

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE OUTDOOR CATALOG

Our two most recent additions to Virginia Wildlife collectables

Bear with Fish

Our bear has caught his fish and is not about to let it get away. This collectable bear is approximately 12 inches high.

VW-518 $9.95 each

Duck with Baby

This baby duck is hitching a ride on its mother. This colorful collectable duck and baby is available in limited quantities.

VW-519 $9.95 each

NEW for 2004

Limited Edition Collector's Plates

Our first in a series of *Virginia Wildlife* limited edition collector's plates. This collectable is titled "Winter Comfort" and is taken from an original artwork by Bob Henley. Each plate is individually serial numbered and has the year of issue identified on the back. Price $22.95 Item # VW-500

Limited Edition Steins

Our first in a series of *Virginia Wildlife* limited edition steins. This companion piece to our collector's plate shown above is also individually serial numbered and has the year of issue identified on the reverse side.

Price $16.95 Item # VW-501

Our Virginia Wildlife Collection of Throws and Pillows

Yellow Lab Pups Tapestry Throw

Created from a photograph by Virginia photographer Dwight Dyke, these five Lab pups lay about in the warmth of their basket alongside tools of their trade. This tapestry throw, created exclusively for VDGIF, is triple jacquard woven of 100% cotton. Machine washable and measures approximately 52" x 69" — $39.95 Item # VW-515
Matching Pillow — $19.95 Item # VW 516

Fall Buck Throw

Triple jacquard woven of 100% cotton, 52" x 69," Machine Washable — $39.95 # VW-511
Matching Pillow — $19.95 Item # VW 512

Down From the North Throw

Triple jacquard woven of 100% cotton, 52" x 69," Machine Washable
$39.95 Item # VW-509

Matching Pillow — $19.95 Item # VW 510

Winter Songbirds Throw

Triple jacquard woven of 100% cotton, 52" x 69," Machine Washable — $39.95 Item # VW-507
Matching Pillow — $19.95 Item # VW 508

For the Art Lover or Collector

Framed 16″ x 20″ prints of our
"Winter in Virginia" original paintings.

Each print is custom framed and matted. These attractive prints will brighten any room and are available for a limited time at — $35.95 each. Item # VW211
please indicate: Cardinal, Turkey, Deer or Grouse

Virginia Wildlife Greeting Cards and Prints

Renowned wildlife artist Spike Knuth has captured the unique lives of Virginia's wildlife. A cardinal, grouse, wild turkey and white-tailed deer are featured in this first set of greeting cards. Each box contains 12 cards and envelopes; three cards per image for only — $9.95 Item # VW-212

Also for the art lover are framable, 11" X 14" prints of each of the "Winter in Virginia" original paintings. The set of four prints is available for — $19.95. Item# VW-56

2004 Limited Edition
Virginia Wildlife Collector's Knife

This year's knife has been custom made for us by Buck Knives. Every facet of this knife indicates that it will be a treasured collectable. From its distinctive handle with gold lettering and brass bolsters to the knife blade engraved with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries logo, each knife is individually serial numbered and comes in a decorative, custom wood box. Limited quantities of 400.

Item # VW-403 $85.00 each

Collector's Patches 2003

The first set in a series to be issued each year. Our 2003 edition has been custom designed exclusively for VDGIF. One patch displays a deer in a woodland setting the other a black bear mother and cub. This first edition is sure to become a valued collectable.

$9.95 set of two patches Item # VW-505

Collector's Patches 2004

The second issue in our collectors patch series. One patch displays a duck in flight against a sky blue background the other a trout for the angler in all of us.

$9.95 for a set of two patches Item VW-506

Buckles

Our bass and duck belt buckle collection is crafted of solid pewter with *Virginia Wildlife* engraved at the bottom. Each buckle comes in a custom gift box with the VDGIF distinctive logo displayed.

$9.95 each Item #VW-502 Bass VW-503 Duck

NEW for 2004

Our *Virginia Wildlife* collection of

Pulsar Watches by Seiko

Your choice $59.00 each or 2 for $100.00

From the Ladies Pulsar collection. This attractive watch has a gold tone bracelet with gold tone hands and markers on a champagne dial. Water Resistant.

Item # W-302

From the Pulsar Nightfall line. TiCN Plating, gold tone crown, hands and markers and black dial. Water Resistant.

Item # VW-301

Mans Wrist Watch, stainless steel bracelet, luminous hands and markers blue sunburst dial. One way rotating elapsed timing bezel. Water Resistant.

Item # VW-300

Book Clock

This decorative book style clock is crafted of solid cherry wood, beautifully engraved with a vivid wildlife scene on the book side of the clock. The clock face is of old world décor, a collectors delight. Clock is 5 1/2" x 8 1/2" when opened..

$29.95 Item # VW-303

Pocket Knife

This attractive and functional 3-inch folding knife, manufactured by Bear Cutlery, comes with *Virginia Wildlife* etched on the oak handle. Each knife is gift boxed. $24.95 Item # VW-400

Commemorative Collector's Coin

Each coin is engraved with the original artwork of a black bear and cub, provided by wildlife artist Spike Knuth, and is packaged in an attractive gift box. *Limited quantity available.*

$9.95 Item # VW-504

Virginia Wildlife T-Shirts

T-Shirt with eagle, available in Black, Navy and Teal $12.95 each
Item # VW-100

VW-103

VW-104

Each shirt is 100% cotton and embroidered with the *Virginia Wildlife* logo, and a largemouth bass or white-tailed deer. Please specify size, M, L, XL, XXL and color, Grey, Navy, Tan, Teal, or Black when ordering. — $12.95 each
Largemouth Bass – Item # VW-103 White-tailed Deer – Item # VW-104

VW-109 # VW-110 # VW-111

NEW Denim Shirts

100% cotton, pre-washed, long sleeve denim shirts with embroidered logo, available in sizes Med, Large, X Large and XX Large. — $19.95 each

Denim Shirt with Cardinal Item # VW-109
Denim Shirt with Eagle Item # VW-110
Denim Shirt with Trout Item # VW-111

VW-106

VW-107

VW-108

VW-105

NEW *Virginia Wildlife* Sweat Shirts

These attractive shirts are a 50/50 cotton polyester blend, with an embroidered logo, and are available in sizes, Med, Large, X Large and XX Large. — $17.95 each

Sweat shirt with Eagle comes in colors Black, Navy and Khaki – Item# VW-105
Sweat shirt with Trout comes in colors Grey, Navy and Khaki – Item # VW-106
Sweat shirt with Deer comes in colors Black, Grey and Khaki – Item # VW-107
Sweat shirt with Cardinal comes in colors Black, Navy and Rose – Item # VW-108

Virginia Wildlife Caps

Hats off to the new *Virginia Wildlife* caps that feature three unique designs. Each cap is 100% cotton, size adjustable and embroidered with the *Virginia Wildlife* magazine logo. — $11.95 each

High profile – deer – Item # VW-118
Low profile – deer – Item # VW-117
High profile – bass – Item # VW-116
Low profile – bass – Item # VW-115

High profile – Camo With Black Letters – Item # VW-113
High profile – Blaze Orange – Item # VW-114
High profile – Camo With Tan Letters – Item # VW-112
High profile – Virginia Wildlife – Item # VW-120
Low profile – Virginia Wildlife – Item # VW-119

NEW *Virginia Wildlife* Caps

Our new *Virginia Wildlife* hats are available in 100% cotton or in denim and are size adjustable. These attractive hats have been embroidered with our *Virginia Wildlife* magazine logo and feature either an eagle or trout for the wildlife and fishing enthusiasts. Hats are available in high profile. Check out our new low profile denim hats. These hats look great with our new denim shirts. — $11.95 each

Navy Hat with Trout Item # VW-121
Black Hat with Eagle Item # VW-122
Denim Hat with Eagle Item # VW-123
Denim Hat with Trout Item # VW-124

Item #	Name of Item	Qty.	Size	Color	Price	Total Price

Make checks payable to *Treasure of Virginia* and mail to: Virginia Wildlife Catalog
P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104
Credit card orders can call (804) 367-2569

Subtotal	
Shipping and Handling	**6.95**
Total	

Payment Method

❑ check or money order ❑ VISA ❑ MasterCard

Account Number

Expiration

Signature

Please Print Name

Daytime Phone Number

Shipping Information

Name

Address

City State ZIP

The HEIGHT of Fashion

©Dwight Dyke

If you hunt from a treestand don't FALL for the wrong kind of safety harness.

by Richard Holdcraft

The use of treestands for hunting has increased dramatically in the past few years. Along with the increased use of treestands comes an increase in the number of serious or fatal injuries. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates there may be at least 11 million treestands in use by hunters. The estimated annual shipments of all manufactured treestand types could exceed 1.4 million units.

Hunters are encouraged, through informational and educational campaigns, to use fall protection devices to prevent death and serious injuries from falls while hunting from treestands. The following are the most common types of devices:

Safety Belts

A safety belt is a single strap or rope, worn either around the waist or chest, with a lanyard that secures the device to an anchor on the tree. The safety belt is sometimes described as a waist belt, chest belt, body belt, safety strap, single strap or fall arrest belt. While a number of manufacturers include full-body harnesses with the purchase of their treestands, a few may still provide safety belts with their stands. Safety belts can be purchased separately as an accessory item. Safety belts are among the simplest and least expen-

Previous page: The full-body harness or parachute style safety harness is considered the top of the line in fall protection devices. The big advantage of this safety harness, over just a safety belt (left) or chest and shoulder harness (right) is that it evenly distributes the fall arrest forces.

sive of fall protection devices sold to hunters and range in cost from $10 to $20. Hunters are subject to serious injury using a device around the waist or chest and can become inverted. They can lose consciousness in less than 2-3 minutes. When hunters fall with a belt around the waist or chest, self-recovery or self-rescue is almost impossible.

Chest and Shoulder Harness

A chest and shoulder harness is basically a safety belt with shoulder straps. Instead of being worn around the waist, it rides across the chest and under the arms. This device is commercially manufactured and sold for approximately $25 to $35. If hunters lift their arms above their heads during self-rescue/self-recovery, they are subject to sliding out of the harness. During a fall, static loads in excess of several thousand pounds are placed against the chest, which could cause ribs to break and penetrate the lungs or heart causing a fatality. The potential for asphyxiation associated with safety belts, straps, or ropes around the waist or chest is the greatest hazard to hunters.

Full-Body Harness (Parachute Style)

A full-body or parachute style safety harness includes straps for the pelvic and thigh areas in addition to the shoulder straps. A full-body harness fastens around the hunter in a manner designed to contain the torso and distribute the fall arrest forces over the upper thighs, pelvis, chest and shoulders, with means for attaching it to other components or subsystems. It is often referred to as a safety harness, or four-point safety harness. This device typically includes the harness, lanyard, anchorage means and connecting hardware. When properly adjusted and worn, it is virtually impossible for the hunter to be ejected from the system. Full-body harnesses are more expensive and can range in cost from $55 to $150. These devices provide the hunter with the best fall protection available.

Post-Fall Suspension and Self-Recovery/Self Rescue

Scientific studies have been conducted by the U. S. Air Force to determine human tolerance to motionless suspension. Volunteers were least able to tolerate the safety belt because of abdominal pressure and difficulty in breathing. The chest harness exerted pressure at the armpit and caused physiological distress in the upper extremities. The study found duration times could vary among full-body harnesses depending on the configuration of the harness. A general finding relating to full-body harnesses was that suspension loads should be distributed as much as possible and concentrations of the loads to the groin area should be minimized. It was also demonstrated that survival times improved if the users repositioned themselves within the fall restraint system.

Survival Times

Many hunters hunt alone in secluded areas and would most likely be required to rescue themselves if suspended by a fall restraint system. Self-recovery and self-rescue can be avoided, to an extent, if the hunter secures the anchor line to the tree at shoulder height or higher. In doing so, the anchor line is shorter which limits the fall distance. In most cases

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©Dwight Dyke

A safety belt worn around the waist offers the least amount of protection to the body and greatly reduces your chances of surviving a fall from a treestand.

the hunter has a greater chance of returning to the stand versus bear hugging the tree to lower themselves to the ground.

Device	Median Times	Range of Times
Safety Belt	1 1/2 min.	Approx. 1/2 minute to 4 3/4 minutes
Chest Harness	5 1/2 min.	Approx. 1 minute to 13 minutes
Full-Body Harness	14 1/2 min.	Approx. 5 minutes to 30 minutes

Orthostatic Intolerance

Regardless of which type of safety harness the hunter uses while hunting from treestands, they should be aware of a condition medical practioners describe as orthostatic intolerance. Orthostatic intolerance may be experienced by any hunter using fall arrest systems. Following a fall, a hunter may remain suspended in the harness. The sustained immobility may lead to a state of unconsciousness. Depending on the length of time the suspended hunter is unconscious and immobile, the resulting orthostatic intolerance may lead to death. While not common, such fatalities often are referred to as "harness-induced pathology" or "suspension trauma."

Recommendations

To reduce the risk associated with prolonged suspension in fall arrest systems, hunters should initiate self-recovery/self-rescue as soon as possible after the fall. Here are a few suggestions for self-recovery/self-rescue.

- Plan your hunt and hunt your plan.
- Let other hunters in your group know where you are hunting and when you expect to return.
- Carry a cell phone or two-way radio communication device with you.
- As soon as you fall, contact someone in your hunting group and let them know you are attempting self-recovery/self-rescue.
- Call them back once you have completed the self-recovery/self-rescue maneuver.
- Let other hunters in your group know that if you do not call them back in a few minutes to come and assist you.
- Keep your legs moving to pump oxygenated blood through your body to major organs.
- Place your anchor line from your full-body harness to the tree at shoulder height or above and shorten the tether line to 24 inches or less.
- Never hunt from an elevated stand if using medications which induce drowsiness or which could result in you becoming unconscious.
- If you are in an elevated stand and become sleepy, sick or drowsy, call for help and quickly descend to the ground.

©Bruce Ingram

Hunters spend a lot of money to equip themselves before going afield. Don't let a few dollars keep you from having the best protection and having an enjoyable outdoor experience.

If you receive a call from a member of your hunting group indicating they need assistance in recovery or rescue, follow these guidelines:

- Rescue suspended hunters as quickly as possible.
- Be aware that suspended hunters are at risk of orthostatic intolerance and suspension trauma.
- Be aware that orthostatic intolerance is potentially life threatening. Suspended hunters with head injuries or who are unconscious are particularly at risk.
- Be aware that some authorities advise against moving the rescued hunter to a horizontal position too quickly.
- If the hunter is unconscious, keeping the hunter's air passages open and obtain first aid.
- Monitor the hunter after rescue, and ensure that he or she is evaluated by a health-care professional. The hunter should be hospitalized when appropriate. Possible delayed effects, such as kidney failure, which is not unusual in these cases, are difficult to assess on the scene.

Although there are inherent risks in anything we as humans do, especially in outdoor activities, using treestands has its own set of risks that hunters need to be aware of. Now that we know more about treestands, their risks, and how we can use them safely, more effort is needed to get the information out to hunters. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission are two departments that are making great strides in reducing the number of serious and fatal incidents involving treestands. Both departments have given considerable emphasis to treestands in their advanced hunter education instructor workshops and to the basic courses offered to new hunters.

We also see that using belts, straps or ropes around the waist or chest is not preferred; that a full-body safety harness will reduce the likelihood of serious, traumatic injury to hunters. Hunting from a treestand and using a full-body safety harness can result in a safe and enjoyable hunting experience. It can be as safe as any other outdoor recreational activity. And, just maybe, you will harvest that big buck you have been looking for. □

Richard Holdcraft has been a practicing safety and health professional for the past 22 of his 37 years in the federal government. He was a Master Instructor while in the U.S. Army and has been an adjunct instructor.

Journal

2004 Outdoor Calendar of Events

October 8-10, 2004: *Eastern Shore Birding Festival*, For more information call (757) 787-2460 or visit www.esvachamber.org/festivals/birding.

October 23, 2004: *Youth Upland Bird Hunt*, Catlett, Va. Contact Jimmy Mootz at 804-367-0656 or e-mail mootzj@dgif.state.va.us.

November 20, 2004: *Generation Deer Hunt*, Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge, deer hunt for youth ages 11-17. Contact Jimmy Mootz at 804-367-0656 or e-mail mootzj@dgif.state.va.us.

Nov 22, 2004: *Novice Deer Hunt*, Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge, deer hunt for the beginner hunter. Contact Jimmy Mootz at 804-367-0656 or e-mail mootzj@dgif.state.va.us.

Dec 4, 2004: *Youth Squirrel Hunting Workshop*, White Oak Mt WMA. For information contact the VDGIF Forest Office at 434-525-7522. □

2003 William Dixon Morgan Memorial Award

Congratulations to Angie Leigh, a resident of Gloucester County for over 40 years, for being awarded the 2003 William Dixon Morgan Memorial Award as Hunter Education Instructor of the Year. The W.D. Morgan Award is administered by the Department and supported by a trust fund established by Mr. and Mrs. Morgan of Madison Heights in memory of their son, who was killed in a hunting incident in 1983. The Award was created to recognize the person who has made an outstanding contribution to the Hunter Education program during the year.

Left to right: Mrs. Sandy Morgan Spencer, Angie Leigh and Lt. John Ober.

Angie has been a volunteer hunter education instructor since 1994 and has taught thousands of individuals to safely enjoy the sport of hunting and the outdoors. In addition to teaching hunter education Angie, along with Lieutenant John Ober, visit local schools throughout the Tidewater area each year and teach 400 to 500 children about Virginia's wildlife and natural resources.

When not volunteering her time as a hunter education instructor and assisting with the many other outdoor activities that the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries puts on each year, Angie, along with her daughter Amanda, her two sons Ricky and Vincent, and her husband Bubba can be found working hard on their farm. □

AROUND THE CAMPFIRE

There Ain't No I Reckon to It...

by Jennifer Worrell

Halloween is a holiday quite significant to game warden Bob Mathers and one of his former Cumberland County constituents. On October 31, 1983, a landowner witnessed this violator shoot a turkey on posted property from his vehicle. To make matters worse, the hunter used a rifle in a shotgun-only county. The landowner watched the portly, bearded man exit his truck and retrieve the bird. Mathers and his sergeant located the spot where the turkey fell and found the casing from the rifle.

The officers knew exactly where they could find information on this perpetrator—they headed for the local general store and check station. Not only did the owner identify the man and his whereabouts, he also knew about the turkey. The two wardens headed for the violator's home. The man plead ignorance and eagerly showed the officers his loaded shotgun. Mathers then asked for the rifle and told the hunter that he had the missing casing. Without thinking, the violator slipped and said that he had the missing round.

The guilty man clapped his hand over his mouth and said, "Oops, I reckon I'm in trouble now!"

Mathers replied, "There ain't no 'I reckon' to it."

Mathers transferred to Lancaster

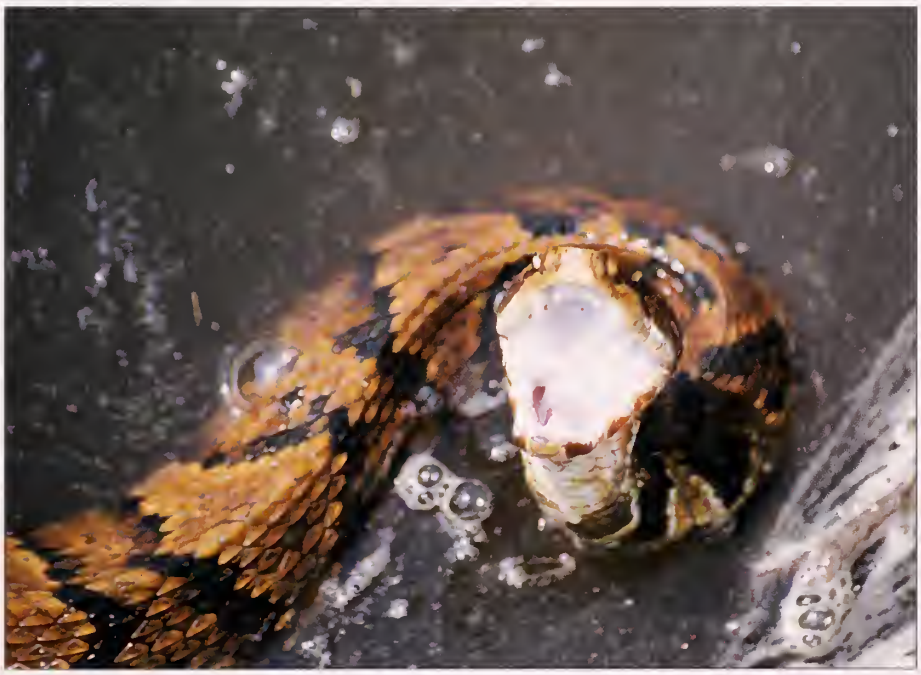
County the following year, but on October 31, 1984, another officer requested the casing Mathers had kept as evidence. The new warden had found rounds in an area where a landowner had seen spotlighting and heard night hunting. When he compared Mathers' casing with the ones found at the scene of the illegal deer hunting, they matched; the subject was again apprehended. Mathers reckons this violator should stay home on Halloween!

"Fred, I don't think that's a good idea."

Thanks to David Norris, VDGIF wetland project leader, for sharing this very up close and personal photograph of a cottonmouth snake *(right)*, also known as a water moccasin. David captured this photograph at Princess Anne Wildlife Management Area this summer while checking and brushing in duck blinds. The photograph is a good example of why this venomous snake is called a cottonmouth. Hunters, anglers and others who spend time in the outdoors are reminded that if you see a snake it is always a good idea to stay alert, don't panic and do not provoke it. In most cases if you just stand still or move very slowly away the snake will have time to escape. If you would like more information about snakes in Virginia visit the Department's Web site at http://www.dgif.state.va.us/wildlife/snake_guide.html.

Singing The Blues No More

It's official! The State Record Fish Committee of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has certified a new state record for blue catfish. Around 1:00 a.m., on June 29, 2004, William Zost, along with his wife Nana of Roxboro, North Carolina, were fishing for catfish on Buggs Island Lake, just above Clarksville. William, who is an avid catfisherman, was using fresh shad as bait when he hooked into and landed a 92-pound, 4-ounce blue catfish. The fish was 50 1/2 inches long and had a girth of 39 1/2 inches shattering the old state record of 75 pounds, 4 ounce, which was caught by Vernon E. McCann on April 30, 2004, on the James River in Chippokes Creek.



On The Water

by Jim Crosby

Winterizing Made Easy

Fall is my favorite time of the year for being out on the water. The cooler evenings drive away the airborne pests yet the days are mostly filled with warm sunshine and not the sweaty kind of heat that we endure in July and August.

Fall is also that time of the year when we must think about and plan for our winter lay up. I don't know of a single do-it-yourself boater who doesn't dread this annual event.

This chore is critical to your boat's integrity, safety, security and future life. Missing an item on the checklist can destroy your boat or its power plant and cost you more than the entire winterizing charge at the local boat shop.

So, if you do decide to do it yourself, make certain you follow all the recommendations of the owner's manual. I have done this for years, not just because I enjoy working on my own boat, but mostly because all the shops within an easy drive are booked so far in advance, I would have to give up some of the better boating days of fall to comply with their schedule.

Of all the steps involved in winterizing, the one that has frustrated me most is the filling of the entire power plant with antifreeze. I think I have tried almost every method ever suggested to fill all those little trouble spots where water stands and can freeze a crack in a critical place. The most disastrous experience was when I left water standing in the risers and they both cracked. That was a very expensive mistake.

It has taken me a lifetime to overcome this one particular step with a foolproof, easy to apply and a "why didn't I think of this sooner" method of guaranteeing complete distribution of antifreeze throughout the entire engine/outdrive combo. I am certain I am not the first to come up with the idea but it is unique to me.

©Jim Crosby

My thought began with the idea of dropping my outdrive into a container of antifreeze that would be pumped throughout the engine by its own cooling system.

I modified that thought and went to the hardware store to purchase a two-and-a-half-gallon plastic bucket I added a through-hole nipple with the threads that match a garden hose connection, a couple of washers and matching nuts.

I used a ¾ inch bit and drilled a hole near the edge but in the bottom of the bucket. Put the nipple in the hole and secured it with washers, rubber grommets and nuts to make a watertight connection. I set the bucket on the swim platform with the garden hose connection hanging over the edge. To this I attach a six-foot section of garden hose that is connected to the u-shaped water muffs that furnish water to the outdrive intake grid.

I supply the bucket with another garden hose from the outside faucet that I normally use to run the engine in the driveway at home. I turn on the water and when the bucket is filled, I start the engine and cool it with the water flowing through the bucket to the intake on the outdrive. When the engine has reached its full operating temperature and the thermostats are wide open, I pull the garden hose out of the bucket and fill it with antifreeze (the biodegradable type for recreational vehicles and boats).

I use four-gallons of antifreeze dumped into the bucket to guarantee all the water is replaced with the red liquid. By this time, the red antifreeze can be seen mixed with the exhaust. This is a sure sign that you have completely filled the engine's many cavities with the red liquid.

When the last of the four gallons has drained from the bucket, I cut the engine off so my impellor won't be run dry and destroy itself. This system proved itself by protecting my engine through a very harsh winter of weeklong days of temperatures in the teens and single digits.

Believe me, I was a bit nervous during that extreme test but the spring de-winterizing proved the protection was quite adequate and complete.

The months I spent constructing the apparatus in my mind proved well worthwhile because it was simple to construct and so easy to use, it made me wonder how in the world it could be so simple and work so well!

RECIPES

by Joan Cone

Wood Duck For A Gourmet Meal

It's nice to have friends like Larry Johnson. He recently stopped by to give us three beautiful wood ducks, a gourmet's delight. These ducks arrived plucked but not skinned, guaranteeing a moist, tasty bird. By preparing these in a slow cooking pot, you secure tender birds even including the little legs.

Menu
Slow Cooked Wood Ducks
Creamy Pasta Bake
Mixed Green Salad
Topsy-Turvy Apple Pie

Slow Cooked Wood Ducks

3 to 4 whole, dressed wood ducks with skin on
Salt and pepper
½ jar (10 ounces) red currant jelly
¼ cup dried cranberries
2 tablespoons butter or margarine
1 teaspoon lemon juice
⅛ teaspoon allspice

Place a trivet in a 3½-quart slow cooking pot. Sprinkle ducks with salt and pepper and place ducks on trivet with breasts up. In a small saucepan, combine jelly, dried cranberries, butter, lemon juice and allspice. Cook on low heat, stirring constantly, until blended. Brush some of the sauce on ducks in the pot. Brush ducks once during cooking, if possible. Cover slow cooking pot and cook on LOW for 7 to 8 hours. Spoon remaining sauce over ducks at serving time. Allow 1 wood duck or other small duck per person.
Note: For more sauce, double sauce ingredients.

Creamy Pasta Bake

½ jar (28 ounces) spaghetti sauce
½ package (16 ounces) rotini pasta, cooked and drained.
¾ cup sour cream
1 package (10 ounces) chopped spinach, thawed and drained
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 375° F. Mix all ingredients until well blended. Spoon into a 13x9-inch baking dish. Bake at 375° for 25 minutes or until thoroughly heated. Serves 4 to 5.

Mixed Green Salad

8 cups torn salad greens of your choice
½ cup toasted walnuts, coarsely chopped
½ cup sun dried tomatoes, drained and snipped into quarters
⅓ cup crumbled blue cheese

In a salad bowl, gently toss ingredients and mix with the following dressing.

Lemon-Dijon Vinaigrette
¼ cup olive oil
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
Grated rind of 1 lemon
Garlic powder to taste
2 teaspoons Dijon-style mustard
1½ teaspoons sugar
Salt and pepper to taste.

In a small bowl, whisk together above ingredients. Makes 4 servings.

Topsy-Turvy Apple Pie

This recipe, inside the Pillsbury Pie Crust box, intrigued me because I was dubious it would work. As you will see, the result was perfect and delicious.

Glaze and Crust
¼ cup firmly packed brown sugar
1 tablespoon butter or margarine, melted
1 tablespoon corn syrup
¼ cup pecan halves
1 (15 ounce) package Pillsbury Refrigerated Pie Crusts, softened as directed on package

Filling
⅔ cup sugar
2 tablespoons flour
½ teaspoon cinnamon
4 cups thinly sliced, peeled apples

Preheat oven to 425° F. In a 9-inch glass pie pan, combine brown sugar, butter and corn syrup; mix well. Spread evenly in bottom of pan. Arrange pecans over mixture in pan. Make pie crust as directed on package for two-crust pie; place bottom crust over mixture in pan. In small bowl, combine sugar, flour and cinnamon; mix well. Arrange half of apple slices in crust-lined pan. Sprinkle with half of sugar mixture. Repeat with remaining apple slices and sugar mixture. Top with second crust. Seal edges and flute. Cut slits in several places in top crust. Place pie pan on sheet of foil on oven rack. Bake 8 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 350° F. and bake an additional 35 to 45 minutes or until apples are tender and crust is golden brown. Immediately run knife around edge of pie to loosen. Carefully turn pie upside down onto serving plate. Serve warm or cool with whipped topping or whipped cream. Makes 8 servings. □

VIRGINIA AGRICULTURE
Virginia's Finest

Naturally Wild

story and illustration
by Spike Knuth

Red Fox
Vulpes vulpes

Hunters and trappers will attest to the intelligence, stealth, and quickness of the fox. Many accounts indicate that foxes actually seem to enjoy the chase and challenge the trapper. They seem to delight in tempting their potential captors and killers.

Records show that prior to 1650 red foxes were not found south of Pennsylvania. Maryland plantation owners imported European strain foxes and introduced them to the Eastern Shore in 1650, and they spread to Virginia by 1670. Later, red foxes from England were imported to Long Island and New Jersey. As forests were cut and land was opened, foxes began to spread. They continued to expand their range and today exist either as a mix of different strains or subspecies, or as the original native strain. It is not known for sure if they are a mix or if the European strain died out and the natives alone expanded.

Red foxes weigh 8 to 14 pounds in weight—a bit larger in the north. The reddish-brown or sandy-brown colors, along with pointed muzzle, long, pointed ears and bushy, white-tipped tails are distinctive.

The home range of the fox is about a mile, but it will range over considerably wider areas if food is scarce. They live along forest edges adjacent to open lands. The den is usually located on a sunny, sandy hillside, or possibly in an old den or even an old woodchuck burrow, with a number of entrances. Sometimes the female (or vixen) will dig a fresh den on her own. The main "room" of the den is lined with grasses.

A single litter is born in March or April and consists of anywhere from four to eight pups or kits. When born they are blind and helpless, and weigh only about 3 ½ ounces. They remain in the den for the first four or five weeks and are weaned at about eight to 10 weeks. The male brings food to the den at first with the female also doing some hunting later during the day and nursing at night. By three months of age they are old enough to begin hunting for themselves.

Foxes feed mainly on rodents, meadow voles in particular, but also chipmunks, rats, rabbits, woodchucks, muskrats, opossums, snakes, frogs, insects, earthworms, insects, wild fruits, berries and birds. Carrion is eaten in winter. Although it is a *canid*, related to dogs, they are very catlike in their movements and hunting style.

Red foxes are mainly nocturnal but will come out in the daylight just before sunrise and just after sunset. They travel the same paths to the extent that they form worn trails. They establish scent posts along the way on rocks, logs, trees, fences, or other structure, with urine or droppings to mark their territory. Calls include a variety of short barks, yaps, or screeches, all of which mean something, but only to other foxes. The terms "sly as a fox," and "crafty as a fox," surely fit this interesting mammal of Virginia's outdoors. □

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Thank you for supporting wildlife management in Virginia through hunting.

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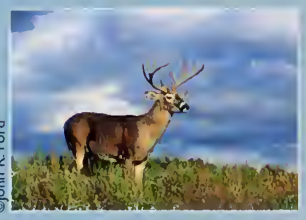

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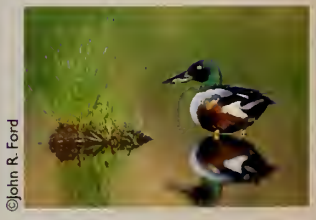

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